

Ed Hyatt transcript

R: My name is Ed Hyatt, I'm a doctoral student here at the University of Melbourne. I'm about three fourths of the way through, so I'm almost towards the conclusion of my third year of a four year program.

I: And tell us about your topic and your method

R: Yeah well I'm researching an area of human resources and specifically selection so I'm looking at job interviews in particular, and even more focused on that structured job interviews so how best to structure a job interview to find the right person for a company, is in a nutshell what I'm researching.

I2: Seems quite appropriate that we're sitting here doing interviews then; you must have a lot to say about the whole interactional process. Could you tell me a bit about what got you interested in the subject?

R: Well in general I'm interested in people and people's experience at work especially primarily because we spend the majority of our working hours at work or are waking hours at work so I'm interested in seeing what we can do to better that experience in general. I've noticed personally that a lot of people don't find it a very enthusiastic environment to be in. And so generally speaking I'm interested in improving that. And it starts I think with making sure that you have the right person with the right organizations. That's typically where I started off with this research. I've never actually worked in Human Resources before. So as a practitioner back in the industry I've never actually worked in that field but my interests are in that area. So again human beings their experiences, particularly at work, making sure that they feel a little bit more alive than what I've observed personally would be a good thing, I think.

I2: And were there some specific things in your work experience that led you to focus on job interviews specifically?

R: Job interviews, anything and my own experience? No. I have had some negative experiences, both as an interviewee and as an interviewer and I do draw on that, my own personal experience in the past of what I felt worked and what didn't work, but I don't think it actually prompted me into going in that direction in particular. Hiring did—the job interviews fall within the area of selection, so that I was interested in, and that did come directly from personal work experience. I had worked for both private sector and public sector, and one thing I've noticed is the prevalence of either internal promotion vs. external hiring, and that was originally the area that I wanted to focus in on, was what happens to a company if they focus too much on internal promotion vs. external higher, or vice versa. What are the drawbacks? What are the benefits that you could get from doing one or the other? Is there a healthy mix is there an optimal balance etc. And that came from witnessing quite a lot of internal promotions mostly on the public sector side that I thought didn't work all that well. And then a lot of very high-up external hiring done in the private sector. It also didn't seem to work all that well. So that prompted me initially to even start the whole PhD process. But the actual topic that I'm dealing with now is kind of tangential to that.

I: So what specific research question are you trying to answer?

R: Yeah for my thesis the specific question I'm looking at is, are there certain conditions that occur as more natural to people in a job interview setting. So after delving into the research for job interviews and the recommendations made by academics in terms of how best to structure these and how best to conduct one that will give you the best task performer at the end of the day, the best person to select. I noticed that there's kind of a bit of a gap in terms of with what I think some of those things will be accepted by actual people in the real field. So I took a look at—there's 18-20 of these specific recommendations and a handful of them occurred to me as...there is no way I would do that.

There is no way I would do that. I wouldn't have done that if I have a bunch of evidence which I do

now have that it actually works in the field. I still wouldn't do it because it just occurs as a very unnatural setting to me. It makes the job interview more mechanistic than it needs to be. Way too mechanical. I don't, I think there'd be a number of drawbacks that are not taken into account by the majority of the research etc... So my specific research question is looking at which one of these recommendations would be most acceptable, would occur as the most natural to people, to conduct in their own real job interviews and which ones don't, which ones would just be so alienating that people would never follow the recommendation anyways, which is something that we see and observe quite a lot.

Practitioners seem to kind of ignore some of the advice that we give them. I think some of that is because some of the advice is just totally off base and just not practicable to implement. So I'm looking specifically at which one of those things fall into that camp and which ones should we stop recommending.

I: And can you describe the process that you went through to get to that specific research question?

R: Yeah. In a nutshell I started with, you know, the other area of internal promotion vs. external higher. Kind of realized the H.R. field I mean selection in particular start dealing with data accessibility issues and what would be realistic to complete as a thesis etc... I think for the job interviews I just started looking at okay well what have... I guess I just started doing a lot of reading. I mean that's really just kind of where it started, and I just noticed that again some of the recommendations that I saw cropping up in the literature I was intrigued by why would anybody think that was a good idea and so I just kind of started following that thread. Yeah I don't think anything necessarily prompted me. There was no shining epiphany moment or anything along those lines. So that got me into the whole area of job interviews in particular also probably because it's the one that involves most human interaction and I'm also intrigued by human decision making so it's the one that gets influenced the most by human decision making rather than say a psychometric tests like a personality test you could give somebody to hire them. There isn't much human influence in that test it's a paper-pen test someone takes it, someone scores, they get a certain score and that's kind of the end of the story there. So the job interview process involves human beings and human decision making. So I guess I kind of naturally gravitated towards that anyways, given my own interest again in people's experiences. And for that research question itself, it's one of four or five things that I noticed that just seemed really discrepant in the literature itself. So I started trying to identify, okay not just what is practically something I'd be interested in researching, but also fundamentally we've got to contribute to theory, we've got to you know broaden the conversation the academic conversation in general as a whole. So it's got to also fit in be of interest to the academic world. It can't just be simply something that would be usable in the world. So that's where I kind of landed on this specific topic. Yeah, mainly because it seems to be fairly under-researched.

And in the few of the articles that I've read that I actually admire the most are almost inevitably most of them have recommended by the end of it that IO psychologists especially have got to start taking into account these types of things, more than just simply the validity of the instruments that they're recommending. So taking that to heart, yeah that's kind of where I landed on the question.

I2: Could you tell us a bit more about this process of reading? And you mentioned some key articles. How did you go about reading, because it can feel quite overwhelming.

R: Yeah, yeah, I would say definitely right at the beginning it's a big mountain and it doesn't ever seem to end either, because everybody has written about everything. I just I didn't have a very focused start perhaps in terms of what I was reading. I just kind of tried to read as broadly as I could. It helps to have a lot of interest so you know there's a good chance that if the article has something remotely interesting in there then I'll be interested in reading it, so that helps. Maybe take a few notes here and there, but really just kind of keep in mind okay that was really interesting that's kind of intriguing. I wonder why then take this into account etc. just kind of reflecting on the reading as I proceed, but then as a mass just doing a lot of it. I mean that's really just what it boils down to, is just continuing to read. You know chock full of references every journal articles got

references to a number of other articles, so you know just following the trails of, Okay, they seem to have referenced this person quite a bit or you know, the contravening results that were found in another article seemed to me like that would be a better picture of what's going on. So I'm interested in reading that article now to see you know what's in that article in particular. So I'm just continuously following threads making little notes to myself about perhaps I really like this article. I like the way they structured it. You know something along those lines I make sure to come back to it. Categorize things as I go. So again I've got four or five areas particularly interested in and especially once you start getting deeper and deeper you realize that even start spreading out. So just making sure I categorize things and have appropriate articles where they belong for the topic, just kind of being structured somewhat about it. I definitely wasn't very systematic in the beginning—it was really more just pick up an article read it, see what you think, follow some other article or maybe some Google searches as well. If the topic itself looked interesting

I2: And did you notice anything in particular about the methods being used in the literature? Where there are things that you liked or didn't like or thought you might use in your research?

R: Yeah I've noticed well at least as it relates to me—I have more of a sociology background than psychology, and so I'm now in a field that relies heavily on psychology type measurements etc.. So just for myself I read it, and you know I'm constantly learning, it's basically like learning a new trade for myself in terms of, okay, got to be concerned about this particular property, got to be concerned about this particular property, and the research method, how they conducted themselves etc.. So specifically in the area I'm looking at now that's what I'm noticing, is just at least personally for myself—okay, heavy psych influence, so I need to really kind of get up to speed on that type of the methodology. That being said, because I do read fairly widely I do run across other methodologies that I'm particularly interested in and that strikes me as something that might be highly applicable. Just as a quick example there's a qualitative comparative analysis technique, which is something that apparently is not quite quant, and not quite qual. I've done a little bit of background reading on it— it handles concepts quite nicely that a linear regression type model won't; and I think it's actually going to be perfect for another study that I want to do, just simply because it's it'll handle combinations of things quite nicely as well, handles equifinality quite well. So there is a few things that I think lend itself perfectly for that, but that's kind of off on a whole other...I haven't seen that methodology being hardly used anywhere and certainly not in selection research.

I2: So you already have ideas for future research projects.

R: Yes, yeah, yeah. I don't seem to have the problem of generating ideas and then having things...like I said, are interesting enough to me to occur to follow down. My supervisors inform me that I have a research agenda planned out, which will probably serve me in the long run but the focus is needed at this point.

I: What was the process you went through to choose the specific method you're using Now? Because as you just keep saying we're always a wide range of methods you could use for your topic.

R: Yeah the one I've settled on now derives specifically from the theory that I'm using for my thesis. So it is a theory that—it's actually a media communications theory and it's always asserted that face to face interaction is the most natural so vs. a telephone call, e-mail, text etc. But the only way it's ever been used before—it's always been very obviously objectively what is the condition that's face to face. So they're comparing these different ways of communicating with one another. What I'm looking at is structured interviews, and I'm asserting that there is a difference there's a qualitative difference within the medium of face to face interaction. And because of that, I need a scale. So the first thing I'm going to be pursuing is scale development. And so there's a whole methodology behind how best to develop a scale to measure what you're trying to measure, and that's out of necessity that I need that, because this theory hasn't conceived of face to face interaction, there being a degree of naturalness within face to face interactions so. So that's what

initially it's out of necessity I'm using that particular approach; and then later it's an experiment and with mock interviews etc. That was based in part on one particular article that I found was done really well, and I liked it. I'm not an experimentalist by design by trade.

So again a lot of learning curve for me. But that article is fairly influential in terms of gaining that and then also a bit out of necessity as well for using that methodology is just simply I'd love to get in with companies in particular and observe stuff. But one, I don't know how feasible that is just within the time parameters of the thesis; and then also I think what I am looking for is very subtle. So it's a very subtle thing and I'm looking for so I think I need to have a lot of control in terms of the actual set-up and design of the of the study itself, and so experiments will lend that to me more than a field study well.

I2: So could you tell us a bit more about your empirical contacts in your sample what your data collection is going to involve.

R: Yeah I haven't progressed yet but what I envision it to be will be utilizing...well for the scale development thing it will just be a panel, online panel. I don't think I even necessarily need experts or very frequent promoters of job interviews people that do a lot of hiring etc. I think I can just basically grab anybody of a sufficient intelligence level and they'll be able to validate my scale. So I plan on using an online panel for that and then for the experiment what I'm planning on using is making a call-out for people that do do hiring. My target population for that is not experts, not IO psychologist not HR professionals. I'm looking at managers, supervisors, people that conduct job interviews and do hiring but supplementary to their primary job duties. Primarily because that's what the majority of hiring seems to be done in workplaces, is people or supervisors have to do it as part of their normal job duties. So I'd like to get those folks in the door to actually conduct the interviews. I was recommended just go ahead and use undergrad students at that point from my interviewees, and then just have mock interviews conducted maybe half hour / 45 minutes, however long; and then record some survey results after that. Ideally videotape them as well so that I can maybe observe some stuff that's going on and gather some more data from that because again what I'm looking for is probably fairly subtle.

I2: You said you'll put a call-out for managers—how will you do that.

R: Well I've worked in a few workplaces so I suspect that I can get a of some folks most of them are back in the US, so it might necessitate a bit of travel or fun to conduct the research back there. If it's here again just kind of get around started asking people—snowbowl technique, you know: find one or two candidates, people that I personally know from having gone to like each functions. There's a couple of companies in town here in Melbourne that do quite a lot of work, not necessarily in selection but other work in workplaces and they hold regular get-togethers and so I've interacted with a lot of people now from a variety workplaces—probably grab a couple of the ones that I know already fit my profile that I want and then just ask them to start recommending others around them. So yeah.

I: so how many how many of the mock interviews are you going to do?

R: That'll be determined by how many I actually need for the quantitative analysis. So I haven't considered exactly the number—I think 30 per quadrants is normally given and I'm going to have 40 quadrants— it looks like it would be you know about 120 or so.

I: Okay so that's going to be driven by the needs of your analysis.

R: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Because I don't see any reason to do more than necessary but I mean obviously I need enough. Yeah, but that should dictate be dictated by the analysis itself.

I2: Do you have any sense as yet quite early days but how you're going to analyze this data. And I'm thinking, you know you mentioned that you're going to video record the experiments as well— have you thought about the analytical process.

R: Just a bit. What I've thought about is in regards to the videotaping is, that would almost be just an actual number of counts. So one of the recommendations I'm looking at is that you're not allowed to allow...ideally in a structured interview, you don't allow the candidate to ask any questions and you as an interviewer are not allowed to ask any follow-up questions, so you already have a predetermined set of questions. It's very structured, very rigid. If the candidate replies to that initial question and there's something a little strange in their response or you're just not getting something etc. you as the interview are not allowed to follow up with them. So it's very tightly structured, right. So I can ask people at the end whether or not they felt this was natural not natural etc. but were videotaping I think will come in handy is to see what did people actually follow this. So did people actually not ask questions, you know, during the course of the conversation because in a national conversation there is an ebb and flow. There is a back and forth. Yeah. Yeah, exactly. So I need to observe more closely I think rather than just simply rely on people's self-reporting, Oh no, this was just fine. Yeah, but you asked for questions that you were specifically told not to in the beginning. So yes it occurred as natural to you. But clearly there is something that it was going against your natural grain for conversation. So that's the videotaping for the analysis of that I think it just be a simple count. I think you would be literally just okay, did people follow instructions? How many times did they ask questions when in the tightly structured scenario they weren't supposed to? Perhaps in the unstructured one to just be illustrative of how often it occurs. So that would be mostly descriptive counts, I think. Analytically, I'm looking at chi-squared tests, a couple of statistical tests, to just see do my structured conditions produce certain results that are different from the unstructured situations, both in terms of how people report, how natural it is, and I might even look to see how valid was it so if I'm using undergrad students I might be able to utilize their GPA and I could have the interviewers predict how good a student they'd be, see how well they match up so that I could also test the validity of my conditions for whether or not an unstructured situation actually gives you a higher validity for predicting somebody's future job performance. I2: That's an interesting and in terms of that video presumably you'll have facial expressions and body language, and all sorts of rich qualitative as well, but is that you sticking to a purely quantitative approach to analysis.

R: Initially yes only because I'm not necessarily conceiving of any qualitative analysis, but that being said, big fan of the exploratory type you know inductive-type method so again would ideally like to videotape these, do transcripts as well. I'd be more than happy to start digging into it in terms of thematic analysis etc... Some of the more qualitative techniques I think would really come in handy as well. So if there's another there, fine; if there is something and it would supplement and complement my quantitative research, yes great. Primarily it's a quantitative one though.
I: Have you started writing yet?

R: I have a bunch of different things different pieces—a lot of background based on a literature review, a lot of justification for why I am using that theory I am using the approach I am planning on taking; there's a lot of preparatory-type writing. How much of that actually makes it into the final cut, I don't know; I anticipate I'll be able to use quite a bit of it. At least I'd hope so. The final-product wise: technically nothing because I haven't really started structuring it, but I've got quite a few words on paper already.

I: So how have you gone about studying writing from scratch.

R: Yeah, from scratch. So kind of going back —my initial conception was three or four very interrelated topics. But everything I've talked about so far is really the one I have landed on as is the topic for my thesis. But my original conception was three or four very similar interrelated topics that we'd all be subsumed under this. How do you pick the right people, how do you structure interviews question. Since then again the research agenda does seem to be too extensive for me to follow, so I'm just doing the one. In terms of how did I start, I actually wrote introductions as if they were individual papers for each one of these ideas, justifying again where did I see the gap in the literature? Where did I see the usefulness of pursuing this question in the first place? What did I envision the contribution of it would be? A very typical lead in introductory type. Maybe a thousand/ fifteen hundred words—actually probably a little bit more—probably fifteen hundred to

2000 words for each one of these paper topics. So that's how I initially started writing was, could I justify in writing even though it seems like a good idea to me in my own head. Could I get it down on writing and would it seem more convincing to somebody else to read this to say, This seems like a valid thing to be pursuing. So this topic that I'm pursuing now is one of those and so that's I guess how I started writing, was I just coalesced all this literature reading into four or five things that I noticed that would be both I think useful and resolve some gaps in literature, answer some interesting problems etc. and then I wrote introductions for each one of them, and then again it just kind of progressed to the point now where it's just this one that I'm going to be using for my thesis. So that's how I started writing.

I2: So, Ed, what would you say as have been some of the hardest things about doing research projects?

R: Let's list them.

Well for me research design. So again I'm reading a whole bunch, not difficult, noticing patterns, not necessarily very difficult either. The more reading you do the more you just kind of just stay open-minded and just, Okay that's interesting so there is another article dealing with it from that point of view, but they still are missing the fact that probably a lot of interviews are not being used to actually pick the best task performer. I never use any of interviews for that purpose. I had other means of determining how well the person would probably perform on the job. I used an interview to get a sense of the human-being in front of me, and whether I'd be happy to go to lunch with that person eventually, and they're going to be my working highly only spending a lot of time together. But the vast bulk of literature doesn't consider that. They look to see how well that person will perform on the job. So it dawns on me, that that's a pattern, right. So I start noticing, Okay consistently they're asking the same question really fundamentally but I think it's the question that other people are asking. So that doesn't seem to be too difficult to me, right, picking up on that type of stuff. The research design does. So it's like I've got an interesting question, I think it legitimately is something that is missing and probably would bear some fruit if we investigated it further.] How do we investigate that. How do you set up the design so that it's the most defensible both, you know, rigorous in terms of methodology, in terms of analysis. How do we know that we're really getting an accurate picture of what's going on. Yeah, I'm not interested in throwing out something that wouldn't be defensible or they wouldn't necessarily again be usable or wouldn't be on target for what actually exists. So getting that research design is a difficult one. I think perhaps maybe is because of a lack of research training in my own background, so I think that's just something to learn. Yeah, a research design has been difficult; I know some people gravitate more towards it and just pick it up naturally. The other really difficult thing for me has been theory development and again that's probably owing at least some part to my own background, which is I'm very, very pragmatic very practical. I personally wouldn't even care how valid an instrument is if it's never going to get used, for example, because what's the point of a really good tool if it's sitting on the shelf. So I tend towards pragmatic-type things which aren't necessarily rewarded or even respected in academia. So sometimes it's like a section about that big in a journal article about the practical implications and I'm sitting there thinking, that's not practical at all. So I lose interest quite quickly if it doesn't seem to have a purpose or use behind it, pitching to an audience outside of the academic line. So for me theory building in that sense is has been a difficult task because this is the industry I'm in now and that is what the audience cares about and there's potentially some very good uses for theory as well just as foundational work and you know from which to derive other questions etc... So it is something I need to get better at in terms of recognizing, Okay start thinking from theory, don't necessarily start thinking entirely from what's the problem, how do we solve it, right. Start thinking from, Okay, what theories are out there, what did they say about human interaction decision making etc. you know, how do we build on that. How do we contribute to that whole body of conceptual work etc... Theory building is something I'm still very weak in. And it's been difficult because, yeah I imagine that's probably the most difficult thing for training.

I2: I think a lot of people find it hard.

R: Yes, yeah, yeah. I don't think I'm in a boat alone on this one.

I2: And what have you enjoyed?

R: What have I enjoyed most? Reading on a wide variety of topics has been really great. Learning about concepts that I never knew existed. Public service motivation—apparently there's an entire way of measuring people's proclivity for wanting to work in the public sector and whether there's an actual difference between individuals for wanting to work in the public sector and I never conceived of that before. If I ever did it's probably on the negative side, this one am more on the positive side. So learning about cost such as that has been really nice very enlivening, you know, for a curious mind it's a great environment to be in. So I'd have to say that that's probably the number one thing for me for what I've enjoyed about the experience.

I: Any tips for managing supervisors? You mean for them?

I: No no, for students

R: Oh for students to manage supervisors. Well I have a particular take on that, because I've never been impressed by that expression 'managing up', because it's never occurred to me that I've ever had...Of all the bosses I've had, the competent ones never asked me to manage up. So it was always the ones that felt like they needed help. that asked me to manage up, which on one hand I can respect but on the other hand I'm supposed to be looking to you for guidance and all of this. So the idea of managing somebody else's schedule who's above me in a hierarchy just seems really absurd to me. So I don't really have any recommendations because I don't really approach it from the perspective of that.

I: What about maintaining a good working relationship with your supervisor?

R: Oh that's a good one. I think keeping in mind I am just one of their projects like I'm not *their* project. I'm not the sole focus for the reason why they're there. They existed before I showed up etc... That's a good one, that's a good counterbalance for any time I'm thinking, Okay why have not gotten back to me or you know what's going on here. Yes. Such is that, so that's probably a good one to keep yourself sane as a grad student. Yeah I'm...just because it's the center of our universe it's not the center of everybody else's. Bearing that in mind, you do need them for success. I mean you do need your supervisors to be clued into what's going on, and so I guess in terms of managing up, you know, constant reminders is probably a good thing, you know, scheduling stuff in advance making sure you get things scheduled in your calendar is a good one. Trying to get them to commit as much as possible to specifics is probably a good idea as well because there is a lot of stuff seems to slip in this environment, so it's easy to push deadlines out etc... so it's a good idea to probably get stuff nailed down in time as much as possible.